Lodemia History

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One of the Fairbury area ghost towns is Lodemia. In the 1960s, it had a grain elevator and a large township hall used for community group meetings. By the 1980s, nothing was left of this little community northwest of Fairbury.

The story of Lodemia started with John E. Bodley, Sr. In 1852, he purchased 330 acres of farmland from the federal government for $2.50 an acre. Two years later, John Sr. moved his family from Fountain County, Indiana, to his farm about five miles northwest of Fairbury. He spent his first few years breaking the virgin prairie and building his farmhouse and buildings.

In 1872, the Chicago & Paducah Railroad laid its tracks from Streator to Strawn. The railroad portion that went from Pontiac to Fairbury went directly through part of John Bodley's farm. Local residents quickly erected a grain elevator. The new train stop was called Lodemia Station. The railroad was eventually bought out by the Wabash Railroad.

John Bodley Sr. was a devout Methodist. He was the primary financial contributor for building the Centennial Methodist Episcopal Church at Lodemia in 1876. The church building had a cost of $2,800, which would be equivalent to $68,100 in today's dollars. Church members built a parsonage next to the church. The church was located at the northeast corner of the T-intersection at 1250 N 1900 E Road.

One year after the Centennial Church was established, the Lodemia Post Office was created. Dr. C. B. Ostrander was the first Postmaster.

By 1878, the farmland that John Bodley Sr. purchased from the federal government for $2.50 per acre had increased in value to $50 an acre. His 330 acres were appraised at $16,500. This appraisal is equivalent to $443,000 in today's dollars.

Lodemia never really took off as a thriving town. It had a grain elevator, church, country school, town hall, and four or five houses. In 1891, the U.S. Post Office in Lodemia was discontinued. Local farmers then received their mail from either Fairbury or Pontiac rural routes.

By 1898, the Lodemia church was 22 years old. Church members remodeled the church, including fresh paint and wallpaper. In February of 1905, the son of John Bodley Sr. died. His son's funeral was held in the Centennial Church. Because it was a cold winter day, the stove was stoked well to heat the church.

After the funeral was over, the funeral party began transporting the body of John Bodley Jr. to the family plot in the Pontiac Southside Cemetery. Shortly after the funeral

procession left Lodemia and headed to Pontiac, the church caught fire and burned to the ground. Because everyone in Lodemia had gone to Pontiac, nobody was left to fight the fire. The cause of the fire was suspected to be the heating stove or chimney.

Six months later, a new church was built at Lodemia. The new church was dedicated by Rev. Jesse S. Dancey, who was the pastor of the Methodist Church in Leroy. Rev. Dancey had been converted into a church member in the Lodemia church that burned down.

In 1907, 23 students were attending the Lodemia country school. These students included many grandchildren of John Bodley Sr. Some of these descendants were Frances Ann Bodley, Avis Bodley, and Paul Bodley.

In 1909, another grand-daughter of John Bodley Sr. decided to attend St. Mary's school in Pontiac instead of the country school next door. At the age of only five, Dorothy Bodley walked to the Wabash train station at Lodemia and rode the train to school at Pontiac every day. Dorothy later married Bernard Tollensdorf, and they ran the Fairbury Paint Store for many years.

After farm mechanization started in the early 1900s, the numbers of farmers and farm children steadily declined. Large families were no longer needed to farm the land. In 1925, the Lodemia church and furniture were sold at public auction.

Lodemia had a sizeable wood-frame building known as Lodemia Town Hall or Lodemia Hall. This building was the polling place for Avoca township. The building was also used for community meetings, including picnics and special guest speakers.

In the 1940s, brothers Charles and John Maley attended Lodemia country school. They were great-grandsons of John Bodley Sr. Each of these brothers carved their names into their wooden school desks. Their wooden school desks still survive and are owned by Maley family descendants.

With the steady decline in the number of farm children, all country schools closed around 1949 in Livingston County. After the Lodemia country school closed, the students had to attend Fairbury schools. In 1952, the Lodemia country school was sold at a public auction.

During the 1960s, Lodemia Hall was a busy community meeting center. The ABC (Avoca Betterment Club) held their meetings at Lodemia Hall. The goal of this group was to improve their farmsteads and help out neighbors. Each year a drawing was held. The winner of the drawing received free labor from all the members for one day to help improve their farm. One year, Jim Goold won the contest. Instead of working on a project at his farm, he requested his neighbors spend the day improving Lodemia Hall.

Keith Coleman was the manager of the Lodemia elevator in the 1960s. He provided a small office room with cold bottled pop, peanuts from a vending machine, and candy

bars. Local farm kids loved to go with their father to the Lodemia elevator on a hot summer day. The farm kids got an ice-cold bottle of pop, along with peanuts or a candy bar. Keith later became the manager of the elevator in Fairbury.

Lodemia area farm kids also liked to spend time on the Wabash railroad tracks. Wild strawberries grew along the route, and they were a delightful treat. Pennies would be placed on top of the steel railroad tracks for the Wabash trains to flatten as they rumbled down the rails every day.

In July of 1971, the Lodemia elevator burned down. Within a couple more years, the railroad tracks were removed, and Lodemia Hall burned down. Today, there are no remnants of Lodemia. All that remains are old photographs and the fond memories held by former Lodemia residents.

Lodemia Grain Elevator Circa 1960